



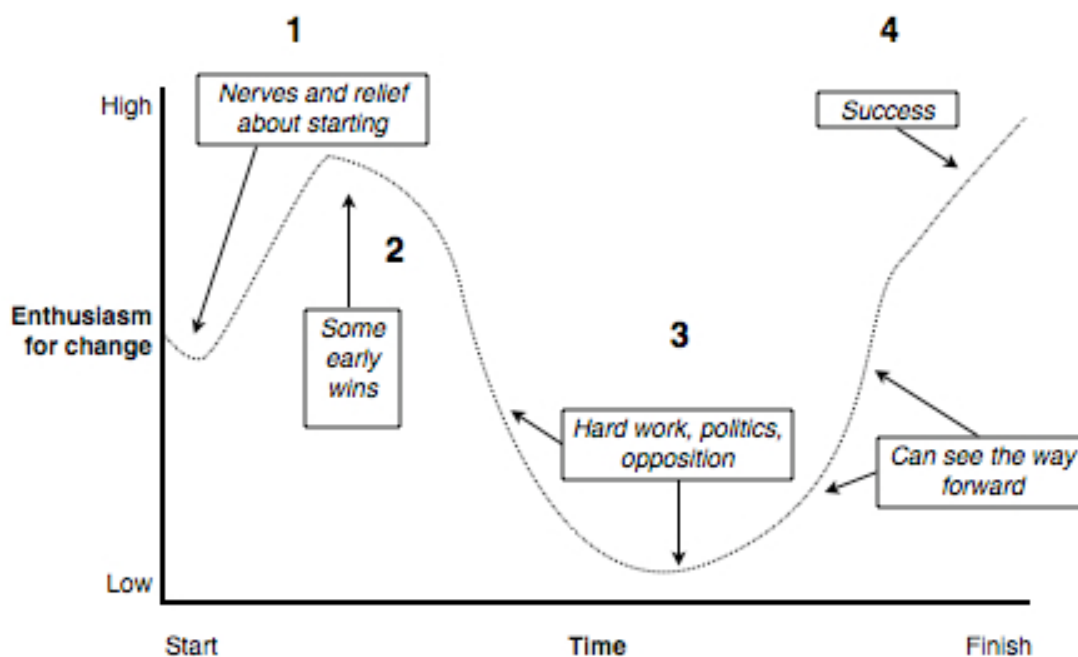
Leading Change

Managers are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right thing. - Warren Bennis, Ph.D. On Becoming a Leader

The cycle of change

Change, unlike rivers, rarely runs smoothly. The initial burst of enthusiasm gets submerged in the trench warfare of detail, opposition and setbacks. You cannot eliminate these challenges. But you can at least set expectations so that no one is surprised by what happens.

The change cycle normally takes the following pattern:



Four main changes

Organizations go through four main changes throughout their growth:

1. Formative Period

This is when a new organization is just getting started. Although there is a founding vision (the purpose of the organization), there are no formal definitions. This is just as well because normally there are a lot of experimentation and innovation taking place. These changes of creativity and discovery are needed to overcome obstacles and accomplish breakthroughs.

2. Rapid Growth Period

Direction and coordination are added to the organization to sustain growth and solidify gains. Change is focused on defining the purpose of the organization and on the mainstream business.

3. Mature Period

The strong growth curve levels off to the overall pace of the economy. Changes are needed to maintain established markets and assuring maximum gains are achieved.

4. Declining Period

This is the rough ride. For many organizations it means downsizing and reorganization. To survive, changes include tough objectives and compassionate implementation. The goal is to get out of the old and into something new. Success in this period means that the four periods start over again.

For some organizations the four periods of growth come and go very rapidly, for others, it may take decades. Failure to follow-through with the needed changes in any of the four growth periods means the death of the organization. Some, such as IBM, do it successfully, others, like ATT, do it quite poorly.

The Japanese have a term called "kaizen," which means continual improvement. It is a never-ending quest to do better. And you do better by changing. Standing still allows your competitors to get ahead of you.

Change Acceptance

Throughout periods of changes, which happen just about all the time for a good organization, leaders need to concentrate on having their people go from change avoidance to change acceptance. There are five steps accompanying change (Conner, 1993):

- 1) **Denial** - cannot foresee any major changes
- 2) **Anger** at others for what they're putting me through
- 3) **Bargaining** - work out solutions, keep everyone happy
- 4) **Depression** - is it worth it? Doubt, need support
- 5) **Acceptance** - the reality

This is why a worker's first reaction to change is often to resist it. People get comfortable performing tasks and processes in a particular manner. This comfort provides them with the security that they are the masters of their environment. Some of the things that cause them to fear change include a dislike of a disruption in their lives, looking like a fool by not being able to adapt and learn, their jobs might become harder, and a loss of control.

Leaders can help the change process by changing their employees' attitude from avoidance into acceptance. This is often best accomplished by changing avoidance questions and statements into acceptance questions:

From "Why?" to "What new opportunities will this provide?"

When they ask "why," focus on the benefits that the change will provide them and the organization. Do NOT feel uncomfortable if you are feeling hesitation about the change too...you are also human. By spelling out the benefits, you will not only comfort them, but help to convince you too.

From "How will this affect me?" to "What problems will this solve?"

Anything that prevents something from being better is a problem. Let them know what the problem is and how they will be part of the solution.

From "We do not do it this way." to "What would it look like?"

Show them, provide plenty of explanations and compassion, and get your team to ask and answer questions.

From "When will this change be over so we can get back to work?" to "What can I do to help?"

Get them involved in implementing the change. Help them to become part of it.

From "Who is doing this to us?" to "Who can help us?"

Focus on the challenges that must be overcome. Ensure that you enlist help from other departments and colleagues.

Change is further complicated as it does not always produce a direct adjustment. Each employee's attitude produces a different response that is conditioned by feelings towards the change. In a classical experiment (Roethlisberger, et. al., 1939) the lighting was improved in a factory on a regular basis. The theory was that better lighting would lead to greater productivity. As expected, productivity did rise. The lighting was then decreased to show the reverse effect - lower productivity, but instead, productivity increased further! It was not until the lighting was down to the equivalent of moonlight (0.06 foot-candle) that an appreciable decline in output was noticed.

Of course it was not the change in lighting itself that caused the higher output, but rather an intervening variable. This variable was diagnosed as the employee's attitudes. That is, when you introduce change, each employee's personal history and social situation at work will produce a different attitude towards that change. You cannot see or measure attitudes, but what you can see and measure is the response towards that change:

Change + Personal history (nurture) + Social situation (environment) = Attitude + Response

In the factory workers' case, productivity rose because they were being observed. This is known as the Hawthorne Effect (named after the factory where the research took place). It means that the mere observation of a group tends to change it.

Although each person will have a different response to change (personal history), they often show their attachment to the group (social situation at work) by joining in a uniform response to the change. For example, one person's personal history might be so strong that she works harder when a change is introduced, while the rest of the group's social situation is strong enough that they threaten to strike because of the change. Although each person in that group might want something different, such as place more demands, ignore the change, work harder, etc.; the need to belong to a group often sways individuals to follow a few individuals -- "we are all in this together." Sometimes the response towards change is influenced mostly by personal history, sometimes it is swayed mostly by the social situation, as John Donne stated so elegantly:

No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.

Leading the Change

Martin Luther King did not say, "I have a very good plan," he shouted, "I have a dream!" You must provide passion and a strong sense of purpose of the change.

Feelings are contagious. When someone around you is feeling blue, it can bring you down. Likewise, when someone is passionate about something, it can have an inspiring effect. Build the change so that others want to be part of it. When you give them part of it, also give them the authority and control to act upon it. Share the power so that they do not feel powerless. You want them to feel useful and enthusiastic. Make them feel needed, that the change could not happen without them!

Kurt Lewin (1951) theorized that there are three stages to change:

1. Unfreezing

Old ideals and processes must be tossed aside so that new ones may be learned. Often, getting rid of the old processes is just as difficult as learning new ones due to the power of habits. Just as a teacher erases the old lessons off the chalkboard before beginning a new lesson, so must a leader help to clear out the old practices before beginning the new. During this part of the process you need to provide just a little bit of coaching as they are unlearning not learning and a lot of cheerleading (emotional support) to break the old habits.

2. Changing

The steps to the new ideals are learned by practicing:

What I hear, I forget.

What I see, I remember.

What I do, I understand.

Kung Fu Tzu

Although there will be confusion, overload and despair, there will also be hope, discovery, and excitement. This period requires a lot of coaching, as they are learning and just a little bit of cheerleading due to the affect of Arousal Overloading.

3. Refreezing

The new processes are now intellectually and emotionally accepted. What has been learned is now actually being practiced on the job. Just a little bit of coaching is required and a lot of cheerleading is used to set up the next change process...remember it is continuous process improvement!

References

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